# A HANDBOOK FOR ORGANIZING AND USING THE WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH TO TEACHING IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## Justification of the Problem

"Whole language" has become a widely used term in education today. Numerous groups which support whole language learning have been started and many books and articles about whole language have appeared. The term whole language, however, has become a current education buzzword, having many different meanings and understandings to people involved in education. Freeman (1990) states that whole language is not merely another educational fad. She says:

> ...whole language provides a perspective on teaching, learning, and curriculum grounded in solid theory and research and implemented around the world in such diverse settings as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Great Britian. (p. 4)

Dr. Judith Newman (1987) states that using whole language in the classroom involves a reexamination of teachers' beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching. She says that whole language does not just consist of using literature, thematic units, centers, arranging furniture in a specific way or establishing a certain classroom schedule. Newman emphasizes that the only route for implementing whole language requires an ongoing systematic and self critical analysis of one's own teaching methods and philosophies.

The writer of this project has taught for 24 years using a "semi-structured" or "semi-traditional" method of teaching. She wanted to become more unstructured and informal in her approach for several years. She also wanted

to use a whole language approach to teaching and classroom organization. However, the writer was hesitant to completely convert to a whole language program until she was thoroughly grounded and had more "sure footing" in the philosophy and procedures of the whole language approach. This research project should benefit the author by helping her become proficient in using the whole language approach in her classroom and the project should also benefit other teachers at Ridgemont Elementary who are interested in making the transition to a whole language based program.

## Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to develop a handbook to guide this researcher in understanding, changing to, and utilizing all the aspects of a whole language program in her classroom while continuing to follow the dictates of administrative policies at Ridgemont Elementary and the Hardin County courses of study.

## Procedure

### Subjects

The subjects for this project were the third graders in Section 3-B of the Ridgemont Elementary School which numbered 20. This was the author's classroom. These third graders were grouped heterogeneously and were eight or nine years of age. They included one learning disabled student, four Chapter I Reading students, and six Chapter I Math

students. The children were mostly from middle class families and all but five of the children had both parents in the home.

Setting

The setting for this study was the 3-B classroom of Ridgemont Elementary School which is located in Mount Victory, Ohio. This small village of about 500 people is situated in west central Ohio in Hardin County. Most of the children in the author's classroom were from rural backgrounds although only two children had parents who were actually engaged in farming full time. Most of the children had parents who both work in factories, banks, hospitals or were self employed in a small business.

Ridgemont School had always had excellent community support until November, 1989, when a tax levy failed for the first time in the history of the consolidation. The levy was again defeated in May, 1990, but a one per cent income tax levy did pass in August, 1990. This income tax revenue plus renewals of existing tax levies should keep Ridgemont Local School operating through 1995.

Ridgemont Elementary is a brick, well-built school. It was constructed in the early 1900's and a new addition was built in 1936. It has three floors and has been fairly well maintained over the years. It accomodates about 300 children in grades kindergarten through six. Ridgemont Junior High and High Schools are housed in a similar brick structure three miles away in the small village of Ridgeway, Ohio.

The 3-B classroom is a large 30 foot by 20 foot room which has four large windows to the south, a tile floor, chalkboards on two sides, and many bulletin boards and shelves. Besides the students' desks and chairs which are arranged in groups of four to six, there is a Math Area, an Art Area, a Listening Area, a Reading Area and Library, a Writing Area, and a Social Studies-Science-Health Area.

## Data Collection

The collection of data and the compilation of this handbook involved reading books and periodicals, attending lectures and workshops, conducting interviews of teachers who use whole language and using the author's and other teachers' experiences.

## Format of Handbook

The handbook resulting from this study consists of five sections. The sections are:

Section 1 Introduction: Whole Language, Theory and Transition

Section 2 The Components of the Whole Language Approach

Section 3 Using Thematic Units

Section 4 The Classroom Environment, Scheduling and Materials

Section 5 Evaluation and Assessment in the Whole Language Classroom and Communicating with Parents

Section 6 References and Resources

## Definition of Terms

Terms which were used in this study and that need to be defined are:

Whole Language, a philosophy rather than an established curriculum or a scope and sequence of skills. The cornerstone of the philosophy is meaning; language must make sense to the learner. In this approach reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking are not taught separately.

Literacy, the quality of being able to read and write.

Strategies, ways of teaching and learning. In strategy teaching the teacher induces the learner to behave in an appropriate way and encourages the learner to confirm or correct his or her own responses--the teacher does not usurp the control which is crucial to mastering a strategy.

Genre, a category of literature distinguished by a special style, form or content.

## Assumptions and Limitations

The result of this study is a handbook which includes theories and procedures applicable to the writer's third grade classroom and is not necessarily applicable to any other classroom setting.

## Results

The result of this study is a handbook entitled "A Handbook for Organizing and Using the Whole Language Approach to Teaching in an Elementary Classroom."

# CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I. The Theory and Research Foundations of Whole Language

- A. Early researchers in cognitive development (Goodman, 1986)
- B. Research in oral language development (Altwerger and Others, 1987)
- C. Research in reading (Bussis, 1982)
- D. Research in composition (Graves, 1985)
- E. Spelling research (Manning and Manning, 1989)

II. Teacher Transition from a Skills Based Classroom to a Whole Language Classroom

- A. Beliefs of teachers regarding the skills classroom and the whole language classroom (Goodman, 1987)
- B. Factors which would inhibit change (Routman, 1988)
- C. Why teachers would wish to change (Farris, 1989)
- D. Stages of transition to the whole language classroom (Anderson, 1984)

III. The Elements of the Whole Language Program

- A. Reading to children (Butler and Turbill, 1985)
- B. Shared book experience (Holdaway, 1982)
- C. Sustained silent reading (Butler, 1985)
- D. Guided and/or individualized reading (Butler, 1985)
- E. Language experience (Butler, 1985)
- F. Children's writing (Dionisio, 1983)
- G. Modeled writing (Butler, 1985)
- H. Opportunities for sharing (Butler, 1985)
- I. Content area reading and writing (Butler, 1985)

J. Whole language in the math curriculum

IV. From Theory to Practice of Whole Language Concepts

A. Using thematic units (Routman, 1988)

B. Organizing classroom time (Butler and Turbill, 1985)

C. Arrangement of classroom furniture and space (Anderson, 1984)

D. Utilizing the School District's Courses of Study

E. Evaluation in the whole language classroom (Au and Others, 1990)

## The Theory and Research Foundations of Whole Language

Whole language has become a current education term which has many different meanings to people, but it is not just another educational fad. Whole language is grounded on solid theory and research and has been implemented around the world. Research in sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, reading, spelling, composition and the development of oral language have all contributed to the research and theoretical foundations of whole language. The sources of whole language theory are found in the great educational thinkers: John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Rousseau, Vygotsky and Halliday. They place the learner at the center of the learning process. (Y. Goodman, 1990) Dewey, according to Y. Goodman (1990):

> ...provides a theoretical rationale for understanding the power of reflective teaching, learners being at the center of the process of curriculum development, and the integration of language with all other studies in the curriculum. (p. 116)

Dewey does not believe that education is a process of preparation for adult life but feels that education is a continuous process of growth and that teachers must make the present experience as rich and as significant as possible. (Y. Goodman, 1990)

Piaget (1971) has also influenced the whole language movement. His theory of cognitive development concludes that the learner is an active constructor of knowledge. As children progress through different developmental stages there are factors which are important to their intellectual development such as play, concrete experiences and interaction with their physical and social surroundings.

Vygotsky and Halliday also view language learning as social in origin. Y. Goodman (1990) points out that:

> Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (or those things that a child can do with assistance) emphasizes the important role teachers play in students' learning, even though learners are ultimately responsible for their own conceptual development. (p. 116)

Halliday's (1973) research proposes that language serves a function for children and that children "learn how to mean." This functional approach to language tries to:

> find out what are the purposes that language serves for us and how we are able to achieve these purposes through speaking and listening, reading and writing. (p. 7)

Research by linguists and sociolinguists in oral language development has shown that social context and the child's interaction with others in social context plays

an important part in language development. Children learn language by actively constructing the rules of their linguistic system. Researchers in whole language propose that the development of literacy (reading and writing) should progress as oral language development does--naturally. Current research shows that by the time children enter school they have vast knowledge about reading and writing because they learn about literacy through interaction with their surroundings and in this natural context language is learned in a holistic manner, not in small, isolated parts. (Freeman, 1990) Altwerger (1987) states that:

> The key theoretical premise for whole language is that babies acquire language through actually using it, not practicing its separate parts. The major assumption is that the model of acquisition through real use is the best model for thinking about and helping with reading and writing and learning in general. (p. 144)

Language acquisition is viewed by researchers as natural in the sense that when language is an integral part of the functioning of the community and is used around and with children, it is learned incidentally or naturally.

Psycholinguistic research has also influenced the whole language movement. Researchers have found that readers use prior knowledge to construct meaning. This "top down" model of learning to read emphasizes entire pieces of text, risk-taking and the three cueing systems of language; grapho-phonemic, syntactic and semantic. K. Goodman (1986), a psycholinguistic researcher, says that reading is a "guess-

ing game" as readers make predictions about the text. Another psycholinguistic researcher, Frank Smith (1982) says what's "behind the eyes" is important in the reading process and that reading means bringing "meaning to the text in order to get meaning from it."

Research in reading (Bussis, 1982) has shown that isolating reading skills is not the way to motivate students who can read meaningful text. Skills are not isolated in the whole language approach. Bussis states:

> Current research accepted by most social scientists suggests that human beings construct meaning in order to make sense out of their experiences. Students often become confused when they are asked to focus on isolated skills that do not make sense to them. On the other hand, when teachers ask students to read books that convey useful information and/or provide pleasure, they are able to construct meaning and come to know that reading is a worthwhile activity. Teachers and curriculum developers cannot crawl inside children's minds and manipulate the orchestration of knowledge that is necessary for reading. But teachers can make this task easy or hard, rewarding or painful, worthwhile or not worthwhile for students by the provisions they make in the classroom and the help that they offer. Specific provisions and kinds of help will depend upon the child, but five general practices include:
> 1. Provide a range of reading materials in the classroom.
> 2. Provide time each day for children to read books of their own choosing or to look at pictures in self-selected books.
> 3. Provide time for children to write, preferably every day but at least two or three times each week.
> 4. Read to the class each day, varying the selections between well-written imaginative literature and interesting informational books.
> 5. Work individually with children at least some of the time. Listen to each child read or discuss

what he or she has read. (pp. 240-241)

These practices are all incorporated in the whole language classroom reading program.

The writing process movement is also congruent with whole language. Donald Graves (1985) is the leader in the writing process movement and he emphasizes several essentials for a successful writing program in the whole language classroom: time, topic choice, response and sense of community. Graves suggests that students write at least four days a week if they are to develop as writers and are to enjoy writing. Graves believes that students should choose their own topics and teachers must help students become aware of what they already know and how to use these experiences and interests as they write. Graves relates that another important element of the writing process is the need for the writers to have an audience who respond to their writing. So students (and teachers also) need to share what they have written. Graves states,

> Writing is a social act. If social actions are to work, the establishment of community is essential. In the whole language classroom children write regularly, take responsibility for their writing, share what they write, and help one another with their writing. They then become a community of writers. (p. 43)

Scientific theory and research in spelling instruction can also be used in planning whole language instruction. Manning and Manning (1987) in their research have found that oral language development and written language

development (spelling) are similar. Teachers and parents realize that by accepting and encouraging early speaking attempts they enable children to develop to higher levels of oral language. Likewise, parents and teachers who accept and encourage students' early spelling attempts will enable them to develop to higher levels of spelling. Manning and Manning (1989) stress the developmental nature of spelling and list several levels: pictures and scribbles; letter strings; consonantal, alphabetic and then correct spelling. Manning and Manning (1989) further suggest in relation to their research on developmental spelling stages that,

> ...frequent and meaningful practice with other readers and writers, and appropriate spelling instruction in the process of writing will enable children to develop to higher levels of spelling competence. The question is not whether or not to teach spelling but how and when to teach spelling. (p. 102)

In the whole language curriculum spelling instruction is based on scientific theory.

## Teacher Transition from a Skills Based Classroom to a Whole Language Classroom

Several researchers give suggestions to teachers who wish to make the transition from a skills-based classroom to a whole language classroom. Kenneth Goodman (1987) says that whole language is countering the skills movement. He emphasizes that whole language is research-based and that it tries to integrate the total language process (from whole to part), not fragment it. Three of Goodman's find-

ings that are especially important in the whole language approach to teaching and that should consequently influence teachers' beliefs in the approach are:

1. Children possess knowledge about written language before entering school.

2. The knowledge children have before they read strongly influences how much they will understand when they read.

3. An interrelationship exists between learning to read and to write. Reading and writing help each other to develop. Goodman concludes that teachers influence students' learning, materials do not. Teachers must be the professionals in charge of their classrooms and be directed by the strengths, needs, and abilities of their students and not rely so much on the basal texts.

There are factors which would inhibit the change to a whole language based curriculum. Regie Routman (1988) re-emphasizes that whole language is a philosophy which refers to meaningful, real and relevant teaching and learning. She states,

> Whole language respects the idea that all the language processes (listening, speaking, reading and writing--including spelling and handwriting) are learned naturally and in meaningful context as a whole, not in little parts. (p. 29)

Routman is striving for a totally whole language classroom but emphasizes that it is a struggle and that this struggle will go on for years. She is still trying to integrate all areas of the curriculum with the language arts. Routman

prefers to use the term "process teaching" to denote whole language concepts and developmental learning. Process teaching implies that the teacher is also involved in the process of developing theories about learning and teaching. Routman lists her concerns about issues which formed the basis for her transition to a whole language method of teaching. These issues are also those which would inhibit change.

1. Teaching students vs. teaching programs
2. Teacher as facilitator vs. teacher as manager.
3. Process orientation vs. product orientation.
4. Development of a set of strategies vs. mastery of a series of skills.
5. Celebrating approximation and risk taking vs. celebrating perfection.
6. Promoting and respecting individual growth and differences vs. fostering competition.
7. Capitalizing on a student's strengths vs. emphasizing remediating weaknesses.
8. Promoting independence in learning vs. dependence on the teacher. (pp. 27-28)

Farris (1989) tells us that whole language emphasizes the process over the product and also emphasizes empowerment through which both the teacher and the student have great input as to what will be taught and the materials and activities to be used. This "empowerment" gives teachers the desire to change to whole language. Teachers who desire to change to whole language learning share these beliefs and philosophies with Routman (1988) and other whole language researchers:

1. All children can learn.
2. Children learn to read by reading.

3. Children need to read and write for their own purposes.
4. Spelling will develop through writing for real purposes.
5. Children need many varied language experiences.
6. Children develop self-confidence through early school success.
7. Children learn through trial and error.
8. Teachers need ongoing support.
9. Young children are capable of high-level comprehension.
10. Independent work must be meaningful and relevant.
11. Reading must be approached through strategies that focus primarily on meaning.
12. Vocabulary is learned best in context.
13. Parents have the right and need to be involved in their children's education. (pp. 27-28)

Teachers begin to want to change to whole language and do change when they have opportunities to visit and talk with other whole language teachers. (Anderson, 1984)

So, after all this information on the theory of whole language, research foundations of whole language, and transition to whole language, how should a teacher make the transition? Anderson (1984) tells us that there is no blueprint or model available for teachers to follow as they make the transition from a skills oriented to a whole language oriented classroom. Anderson suggests a gradual transition from skills to whole language and he describes four incremental and overlapping stages teachers may go through to make the transition:

1. Traditional skills classroom
2. Modified traditional skills classroom
3. Transitional whole language classroom

4. Whole language classroom

Anderson describes how teachers can change in the use of several interrelated components of classroom organization and management in each incremental stage. The components which teachers need to change and adapt as they make the transition include:

1. Instructional time
2. Use of classroom space
3. Personnel
4. Methods, materials and learning experiences
5. Evaluation
6. Grouping

Anderson further emphasizes that change is neither an easy nor a painless process on a personal or a professional level and necessitates total involvement of teachers with administrators, boards of education and parents. Anderson (1990) further states,

> The transition from skills to a whole language curriculum offers new and exciting experiences for all involved. As teachers begin to make the transition, their autonomy and security must not be threatened. Teachers need the support of a risk-free environment as they move from a traditional skills classroom to an integrated whole language classroom. Not every teacher should be required or expected to change at the same rate or at the same time. The goal, however, should be over time to develop group consensus to change once the decision has been made by group planning involving the school board, superintendent, principal, teachers and parents. (p. 17)

## The Elements of the Whole Language Program

There are several elements in a balanced whole language curriculum but whole language begins with quality literature. Children are read to on a daily basis. Favorite stories are read again and again and sometimes are put on tape so that the children may listen on their own. Books (many books) are available to children for them to take home. Predictable books are used in beginning reading. Oral and written compositions easily follow the reading of a predictable book because children can compose their own stories based on the pattern of the book. Children are encouraged to write about what is meaningful to them even if spelling is invented and they are encouraged to share their compositions. The whole language teacher reads aloud often so that children develop a sense of story. Andrea Butler (1984) summarizes ten elements of a balanced whole language program:

1. Reading to children
2. Shared book experience
3. Sustained silent reading
4. Guided reading
5. Individualized reading
6. Language experience
7. Children's writing
8. Modeled writing
9. Opportunities for sharing
10. Content area reading and writing

Dorothy Watson (1987) tells us in the newsletter called "Teachers Networking" that,

> Whole language teachers think that language (spoken and written) is fascinating and they invite kids to join them in their love of it. Whole language teachers know that the real curriculum is everything that affects what goes on in the kids' heads, whether planned or unplanned, intentional or unintentional, as well as what actually goes on in those heads. Whole language teachers invite students daily to think and to learn by talking, reading, and writing about important things in science, math, social studies, and life. Whole language teachers make it easy for students to enjoy the circumstances of real thought (risking, hypothesizing, organizing, categorizing, summarizing, modifying, and a thousand other "ings"). (p. 4)

## From Theory to Practice of Whole Language Concepts

Thematic units are often used in the whole language classroom and involve specific, general or open-ended topics. A thematic unit might involve the use of books, filmstrips, records, art, compositions, word lists, plays, and/or cooking. Teachers in whole language classrooms use their imaginations in creating and organizing thematic units. (Routman, 1988)

Whole language classrooms have common characteristics in regard to organization of classroom time, groups, and the arrangement of the classroom furniture and space. Butler and Turbill (1985) describe the whole language classroom as one with an area where the whole class can work together and where there are also places where individuals

and small groups can work. The groupings are kept flexible to avoid labelling. Whole language teachers believe that children who have mastered a particular concept make good teachers for those children who are still in the process of mastering the concept. Whole language teachers allot time wisely and allow time in their planning for demonstrating and providing good reading and writing models; extended periods each day of reading and writing on the children's chosen topic; responding through art, craft, drama, music, writing, movement, talking and other expressive activities; sharing of the children's work; and group interaction where the children are free to learn from each other. Whole language classroom teachers allow time for teaching--sometimes the whole group or an individual or a small group--but always the teaching points emerge from the children's needs. (Butler and Turbill, 1985) Anderson (1984) further describes the classroom space in the whole language classroom. He states that,

> The space is used flexibly with various learning centers to develop language abilities through a thematic unit approach. Certain classroom areas are organized for social studies, science and math centers. There are different variations possible for arranging a classroom to integrate language abilities within content experiences. (p. 526)

Of course, using the whole language approach to teaching does not mean that the teacher ignores the curriculum guides of his or her district. Teachers have not historically,

however, been involved in the planning and the decision-making process to plan the curriculum and they need to be involved more. This does not mean allowing principals and teachers unlimited freedom to do as they please. Rather, according to Anderson (1990),

> The school district should have general curriculum goals for literacy but allow individual school staffs to determine how they will translate the district philosophy and goals into classroom practice. (p. 17)

Evaluation in the whole language classroom is one of the chief areas of concern. Au, Scheu, Kawakami and Herman (1990) address this issue by saying that,

> In a whole literacy approach, the main purpose of assessment should be to provide teachers and students with information useful in promoting students' growth in literacy. (p. 575)

They believe that the assessment system should be as close to ongoing classroom activities as possible. Their assessment is based on portfolios showing each students' accomplishments as a reader and writer. The students' portfolios provide information about their development in these six aspects of literacy: ownership, reading comprehension, writing process, word identification, language and vocabulary knowledge, and voluntary reading. Au and others (1990) state that because the six aspects of literacy are so interrelated some assessment tasks are used to check growth in two or more aspects of literacy. There are five major assessment tasks and procedures:

1. Questionnaire on attitudes toward reading and writing
2. Response to literature task
3. Sample of student's writing
4. Running record
5. Voluntary reading log

Au (1990) further states,

> The portfolio system gives teachers information relevant to improving instruction and data may be summarized according to grade level benchmarks derived from a state curriculum guide and other sources. (p. 577)

Routman (1988) also believes that evaluation can be completed successfully in the whole language curriculum by the use of running records, tape recordings of oral reading, records of oral responses, oral reading to determine strategies the child is using, reading records, reading response logs, writing journals, writing folders, conferencing, written tests, responding in writing, extension activities and self-evaluation. All of these methods look at individual progress and give the teacher in the whole language classroom specific information on the child's needs and growth. Goodman (1986) states that,

> Whole language teachers are constant kid-watchers and evaluate and revise their plans on the basis of the on-going kid watching they do. (p. 41)

## Conclusion

In conclusion, a whole language program is a life-

centered, child-centered environment in which reading, writing, listening, talking and thinking are integrated in a stimulating, natural, language-learning way. Whole language teachers create this stimulating environment which is rich in natural language learning conditions. Their task will be challenging and exciting but whole language teachers not only teach; they foster joy and excitement in learning.

# CHAPTER III

# RESULTS

## A HANDBOOK FOR ORGANIZING AND USING THE WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH TO TEACHING IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

# A HANDBOOK FOR ORGANIZING AND USING THE WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH TO TEACHING IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

BY

CORA J. DICKINSON

JULY, 1991

# HANDBOOK

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# SECTION I

## Introduction: Whole Language, Theory and Transition

Whole language is not a particular program or materials that can be purchased. It is not a guide for success in the classroom. Whole language is a philosophy. It is a way of thinking by teachers about how children learn language--both oral and written language.

Children learn oral language naturally at home by listening and talking. They are not expected to be perfect in these developing years and they are free to make mistakes and approximations which the adults in their lives accept because these adults realize children are not perfect while oral language develops. The adults realize that oral language learning takes time and practice.

When children enter school, however, and begin to read and write, instant success is often expected. But, just as in oral language development, children who are learning to read and write need ample time to practice reading and writing through experiences that are meaningful. Just as in oral language development, they need freedom to make mistakes and to learn from their mistakes. Whole language teachers understand how language learning develops. They provide time and practical opportunities for literacy development.

Although there is not a single program or guide for a successful whole language approach, whole language class-

rooms do have several common characteristics. The students in whole language classrooms progress through developmentally appropriate stages; they are involved in social interaction each day; they share responsibility with their teacher for their learning; they feel free to take risks in practicing their reading and writing; and they evaluate their own progress as a part of all their learning experiences. The teachers in whole language classrooms view their students as capable; they become "kid-watchers" and co-learners as they interact with the students; they demonstrate model reading and writing; they facilitate student learning; and they give students positive and specific reinforcement. In the whole language classroom instruction occurs through authentic and meaningful reading and writing experiences; placing equal importance on process learning and content learning; integration of language processes across the content areas; providing quality literature to support literacy development; and empowerment of the students and the teacher through choice and ownership.

More and more teachers are making the choice to change to a whole language philosophy in their approach to teaching because they have found that students are more excited and motivated in the whole language classroom. The students take more responsibility for their learning and this results in better classroom management. Teachers are also finding that the use of children's literature to teach reading and

the use of meaningful writing experiences are more motivating, exciting and interesting, not only for the students, but also for the teacher.

Making the transition to becoming a whole language teacher should be accomplished slowly by selecting the methods, materials, activities and schedules that are suitable for each individual teacher's particular classroom and style of teaching. Each teacher needs to decide on their own time frame for change. One time frame might be the inclusion of two or three elements of a whole language curriculum each year over a four or five year period until finally the teacher is comfortable and is using all the components of a model whole language curriculum. During this time of change the teacher should strive for professional growth by reading professional articles and research about whole language, learn more about children's literature and read children's books by many different authors, attend local, state and national meetings on whole language and form support groups for sharing ideas on whole language with other teachers. By the end of this transition period the teacher should have a child-centered classroom with a schedule and materials organized effectively and efficiently in which meaningful activities for teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing are planned and executed. The teacher should be able to use themes to integrate all the other areas of the curriculum and be able to assess and evaluate daily the progress of

each child. The teacher should be able to communicate with parents, peers and the administration about all the aspects and the rationale of the whole language approach to teaching.

# SECTION II

## The Components of the Whole Language Approach

### Literacy Learning Conditions

In the whole language classroom there are seven conditions necessary for the successful acquisition of the language processes of listening, speaking, reading and writing according to Brian Cambourne (1987) in the book Towards A Reading-Writing Classroom by Butler and Turbill. These conditions are immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, employment, approximations and feedback or response.

Immersion in literacy learning means that the children need to be surrounded by a wide range of texts and need to be involved in their production and use. In the whole language classroom you will find environmental print, child-made labels, students' work, student-made charts, writing samples and projects everywhere instead of teacher-made bulletin boards and displays. The library in the whole language classroom needs to be made comfortable with rugs, bean bags, cushions or stuffed animals and partitioned off to make it a quiet area where the children can enjoy quiet reading and privacy. Many, many books should be in the library area arranged in boxes or on shelves by author or genre to help the students make selections. Also in the library area there should by many magazines, dictionaries,

newspapers and any other available reading materials such as charts, brochures, pamphlets, advertisements or catalogs. One teacher suggests having the local newspaper available in the classroom library for a few days and then recycling the back issues. Books should not only be kept in the classroom library but should be displayed in every available place throughout the whole language classroom.

In the whole language classroom students benefit from demonstration which means that explanations and models of all kinds of reading and writing activities help them to see how language experiences are conceived, constructed and used. Overhead projectors, transparencies, chart paper and chalkboards are used alot to demonstrate the writing process. Students should listen to taped stories which model expression and fluency. An area of floor space should be reserved for large group seating where the whole language teacher models reading during read-aloud time or shared reading time. Book talks, choral reading and work on small group projects can also be held in this area. In the whole language classroom children learn from the demonstrations of their peers during large or small group activities.

Another condition for literacy learning in the whole language classroom is expectation. Learners are either stimulated or inhibited by the expectations of those adults and peers around them whom they respect. In the whole language classroom the children are expected to work and learn at a developmental level which is appropriate for them. In the

whole language classroom there should be many materials, activities and books on different levels so the students can make selections with which they are comfortable. A variety of chapter books, picture books and wordless books should be available and centers should be set up around the room and organized so that there are active learning opportunities for each child in the classroom. At the listening center there should be headsets, a tape recorder, tapes with matching books, and tapes of music and movement activities which actively involve the children. At the art center a daily or weekly project with written instructions should be organized and a model of the finished art project displayed. Our school's curriculum prescribes one hour weekly for art so this time could be spent in whole group instruction, taped art demonstrations or art appreciation lessons. Then the art center could be used for small group activities which would be extensions of the concepts taught during the one hour whole-group time. The writing center and publishing center could be separate or combined at a large table. Writing supplies, a chart of the writing process steps, students' writing folders and materials needed for publishing (wallpaper, construction paper, contact paper, scissors, staplers, glue, markers etc.) are stored on shelves in this area. The computer center is used for word processing and math, reading or science games. The students are assigned or sign up for this area and use it at least twice weekly. A math area in the whole language classroom contains many manipulatives, games and

trade books which relate to math such as How Much is a Million? by Steven Kellogg. The science--social studies--health center is also appropriate in the whole language classroom. Classroom pets, globes, maps, games and related trade books are available there for students to use in either whole group or small group activities.

In the whole language classroom responsibility is another condition for literacy learning. Students grow in self reliance in the whole language classroom because they share in the responsibility for their learning. They are allowed to make their own decisions about when, how and what their learning tasks will be. The teacher becomes the facilitator of learning in the whole language classroom as the children are taught and assume the responsibilities of gathering facts, brainstorming, displaying and sharing their work, cleaning, restocking shelves, selecting and returning books and supplies, bringing needed items from home, doing classroom duties, moving around the room freely and keeping the classroom schedule.

Employment is another condition of literacy learning in the whole language classroom. Employment means that the children are actively engaged in purposeful learning in the whole language classroom. The learners must have time and opportunities in meaningful situations to practice and use (employ) their developing control over what they are learning. Traditional "seatwork" or workbook pages are not used in the whole language program. Instead, the children are

involved in small group or individual activities while the teacher is involved in reading or writing conferences or moves around the room observing or interacting with students or taking notes. Parent or older student volunteers are also helping the small groups or individuals on their projects or are listening to children read. When students are involved in real learning activities, responsibility, independence and a feeling of ownership are developed.

Another literacy learning condition is approximation. This is the process of learning and improving by the trial and error method. Students in the whole language classroom feel free to take risks and experiment because they are rewarded and encouraged in their efforts even though their efforts may not be perfect. The whole language classroom teacher attempts at all times to provide learning activities on the many levels of the children's abilities and to accommodate all learning styles. Invented spelling is accepted and the teacher avoids red correcting marks on the children's work. The students are encouraged to do their best but approximate answers and responses are accepted.

Feedback and response are also conditions for literacy development in the whole language classroom. Those around the students (adults and peers) respond to their words and work with interest. In the whole language classroom the desks are arranged in clusters so that discussion, cooperation and conferencing among the children and/or the teacher are

promoted. The teacher encourages self-evaluation during student-teacher conferences. The author's chair is a special place in the whole language classroom where students read a rough draft or published story they have written. The other students applaud, ask questions or make comments about the story which builds self esteem in the children as each child takes a turn in the author's chair on a weekly or pre-determined schedule.

The whole language classroom is a busy and sometimes noisy place as the students, volunteers and teachers interact in the language learning that is occurring. The classroom may even seem chaotic because the teacher is not the center of activity but each child and the teacher know the purpose at hand--learning. Order is maintained because routines have been well established with the children, slowly and thoroughly over a three or four week period of time early in the school year.

Whole language means that all four language processes (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are learned in whole rather than in segmented parts. In the whole language classroom children participate actively in all four of the language processes and often a single lesson includes all four of the language processes so that the students understand the connection between written and spoken language.

Students develop oral language naturally before coming to school and command of oral language is the basis for suc-

cess in reading and writing. In the whole language classroom students should participate actively in listening and speaking activities each day. Children gain confidence and self esteem and develop strong vocabularies when they participate actively in listening and speaking activities. A few listening activities that whole language teachers should provide for their students are:

1. Listening to tapes or records of books at the listening center.
2. Recording the students' own reading on tape so they can listen to themselves.
3. Listening to book talks and answering questions about the book or commenting about the book.
4. Following oral directions in sequence.
5. Listening to guest speakers, field trip guides or performers during school assemblies.
6. Listening to vocal or instrumental music either live or on tape and identifying various sounds, repetitions or variations.

There are many more listening activities that the teacher can plan.

A few speaking activities in the whole language classroom could include:

1. Retelling stories.
2. Acting out stories and plays.
3. Reciting poetry or chants.
4. Choral reading.

5. Share and tell activities.
6. Singing.
7. Explaining a project or giving oral directions.
8. Giving a book talk.
9. Giving puppet shows.
10. Brainstorming ideas.
11. Author's chair activities (reading a draft or published story the student has written to fellow classmates).

Whole Language Elements

Andrea Butler (1987) lists ten elements of a balanced whole language program in her book, The Elements of the Whole Language Program. These elements are:

1. Reading to children
2. Shared book experience
3. Sustained silent reading
4. Guided reading
5. Individualized reading
6. Language experience
7. Children's writing
8. Modeled writing
9. Opportunities for sharing
10. Content area reading and writing

Each of these ten elements of the whole language program focuses on different combinations of the conditions for literacy learning which were previously discussed. Although

guided reading and individualized reading are included in the ten elements, whole language teachers usually choose between these two. Ideally, individualized reading will develop out of a well organized guided reading program.

One of the most important goals of the whole language classroom is producing children who want to read and write. This goal will be realized when the whole language program includes a variety of reading experiences. Students of all developmental reading stages: emergent readers (pre-school to early first grade), early readers (first graders and beginning second graders) and fluent readers (late second graders and on) can participate in these reading experiences.

## Reading Aloud

One of the most effective ways to teach reading and to get children hooked on books is to read quality literature to them. Reading to children affects their reading habits and greatly increases their writing ability. All students (even older children) should be read to on a daily basis, even two or three times daily is suggested if possible. The main purpose of reading aloud to children is to immerse them in quality literature. By reading aloud to students often the teacher is projecting the positive message that reading is a valuable and worthwhile way to spend time. The teacher should try to include all genres of literature during the read aloud times. These genres are nonfiction,

fiction, biography, autobiography, sports, poetry, drama, realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, mythology, legends, folktales, fairy tales, fables, short stories, mystery and romance. Not all of these genres will be appropriate for all ages but the teacher should include as much variety as possible. It is very important to include nonfiction because of the complex meanings which the text involves.

There are many advantages to children in having books read aloud to them. They will hear stories which may be too difficult for them to read independently. A good model is provided when the teacher reads aloud. Interest is generated in the literature. The children get to know the different styles of authors. The children's imaginations are stimulated. The children get to hear the sounds, new vocabulary and rich language structures there are in the world of literature. The children can relate to the characters and learn about other peoples' experiences.

The teacher should choose a book for read-aloud time which correlates to some part of the curriculum--possibly a theme or an author study in which the class is involved. The teacher should always have the book read beforehand, ask a few prediction questions, read about the author, tell about other titles by the same author or give the children any background information about the book which will help them enjoy and appreciate it. The teacher should read with as much expression as possible because this holds the children's attention

and will increase the quality of the children's own oral reading performances.

Shared Book Experience

Shared book experience is another element of a balanced whole language program. Shared book experience involves the whole class of children sitting close together while they share the reading and re-reading of stories, songs or poems. For older children the shared book experience should be brief and lively. Suitable books for shared reading experience are ones which have a strong storyline in which something actually happens, characters with whom the children can identify strongly, attractive illustrations, humor and warmth and rich memorable language which ensures predictability. The books should be in two sizes--big books for the whole class to see and small editions for independent re-reading. Shared reading experience is an excellent way of selling reading to children because it is pleasurable and meaningful. It is especially valuable to reluctant readers.

The shared reading experience allows children to see a demonstration of a book and the process of handling a book. After selecting an appropriate big book, trade book, chapter in a book, poem or song the teacher introduces the title, author and illustrator. Children are asked prediction questions about the story's plot and then the teacher reads aloud to the children while modeling book handling, left-right pro-

gression, expression and enthusiasm. It is very important that the teacher provides the best model possible of how a proficient oral reader reads. The modeling of reading for meaning is very important also. The teacher then leads the children in a brief discussion of the story, poem or song. Follow-up activities may include re-reading by the children, writing, art, crafts or plays. During re-reading the words and illustrations should be seen easily by the children. During re-reading the children have opportunities to participate, to recall ideas and vocabulary in the selection, to appreciate the author's style and to observe and to demonstrate reading strategies and language conventions which include getting meaning from the print using semantic, syntactic and graphophonetic cues, predicting, checking and confirming the text, and appreciating the aspects of punctuation, spelling and layout of the text. The use of the audio cassette can add variety to the re-reading phase of the shared reading experience. The shared reading experience should last for 15 to 30 minutes. At kindergarten through second grade shared reading experience should occur daily but at third grade through sixth grade level it should occur occasionally.

Sustained Silent Reading

Sustained silent reading is another element of a balanced whole language curriculum. During this time the stu-

dents and teacher read silently for an extended period (usually 15 to 30 minutes) daily. The children can read material of their own choice but no other activity is allowed during this period. The main goal of sustained silent reading is to establish regular reading habits. Trade books on all levels, magazines, nonfiction books and child-owned books are good choices. The values of sustained silent reading are many, including: children have an extended period of time to get "into" a book; children see an adult in their lives reading and valuing reading; and teachers can become familiar with the individual preferences in reading of their students during this time. It is important to set guidelines for sustained silent reading and these guidelines should be posted. These may include:

1. Any book or reading selection is acceptable.
2. The timer is set for the length of the session.
3. There are no interruptions during the period.
4. The children do not change books.
5. Everyone reads silently including the teacher.

The length of the session should be gradually increased as the children develop as readers and they should be praised for quiet, sustained reading when the session is finished. When the timer sounds the children should go to their next activity which is unrelated to reading such as physical education or recess. The teacher should not require any reading activity or response related to the book read during

sustained silent reading. Groups of two peers could read quietly during sustained silent reading for variety. Having the students read to younger children or having older children read books to individuals in your class during sustained silent reading sometimes builds self confidence in reluctant readers.

Guided Reading

In the whole language classroom guided reading is the heart of the program because it offers the teacher the opportunity to teach reading strategies which will improve comprehension and teach the skills necessary for the students to become more fluent readers. The teacher works with a small group of four to eight students during this time to study the chosen book and its ideas intensely. Quality literature in multiple copies is used. At the third grade level the guided reading lesson is about thirty minutes long and the groups can be organized by ability or mixed ability. The goal of the session is to enjoy the book together but at the same time the group will have the opportunities to predict text and vocabulary, integrate phonics with meaning cues, use oral and written cloze to predict words in context, predict and confirm happenings in the story and read silently and orally in a group situation. At third grade level most students are reading fluently so the emphasis during guided reading should be specific vocabulary, word attack skills and inferential reasoning. There are several variations of the

guided reading procedure but one suggested sequence goes as follows:

1. The teacher introduces the story to build interest and background.
2. The teacher reads the literature selection aloud and asks prediction-type high level questions about the section that was read.
3. The children discuss the section the teacher has read. (Examples of discussion questions are included in the resource section of the handbook).
4. The teacher sets the purpose for reading and instructs the students to read on either orally or silently. The children should have the opportunity to read the passage silently before being asked to read orally. The teacher needs to remind the students frequently that they have several strategies they can use when they come to an unknown word in silent or oral reading. They can read on to the end of the sentence and guess the word using context clues; check the beginning letters and guess the word; leave the word out entirely and go on; ask the teacher for the word; or jot the word down and ask later.
5. The teacher uses passages from the book to focus on specific reading strategies or skills such as cloze procedures (either oral or written) for predicting and confirming words and meaning, focusing on specific words, figurative language etc.

6. The students complete individual skill activities which help the teacher evaluate each students' mastery of the story.
7. The book is made available for independent re-reading and extension activities such as art work or writing a different ending for the story may be included as part of the lesson. The best extension activities require the children to refer to the text to find extra information or look for clarification. This enhances comprehension. Sometimes no extension activities should be required as enthusiasm and enjoyment of the literature may suffer.

Individualized Reading

Individualized reading may be used as an organizational alternative to guided reading and ideally individualized reading grows out of guided reading. Sometimes teachers use both guided reading groups and individualized reading if time permits. In individualized reading the students can sign up for individual conferences every week or every two weeks. These conferences last ten to fifteen minutes and the children discuss the book of their choice with the teacher. The teacher may ask questions or have the child read a portion of the book aloud. The individualized reading conference should be an opportunity for a child to tell why their book was interesting, funny, or significant. The children are responsible for keeping a reading record of the books they have

read. (A sample reading record is included in the resource section of the handbook). The children need lots of time to make choices and read a wealth of reading material and a variety of genres for individualized reading. Literature extension activities such as art projects, cooking or writing projects may result from individualized reading and sharing of these activities and the books which inspired them should be encouraged.

Language Experience

Language experience is another element of the balanced whole language program which should be included. Language experience is a method of teaching based on the language generated orally by the children. The teacher or other students act as scribes in recording this oral language or the language can be recorded on tape. The oral language generated is then available to the children in written, readable form. The written material is very relevant to the reader and is in the reader's own language. The whole language teacher plans for or utilizes experiences that arise suddenly for language experience activities. Planned experiences may be cooking, field trip accounts, or visitors to the classroom. Spontaneous experiences may be sudden weather changes, classroom pets giving birth or unexpected visitors. During language experience the children should be encouraged to talk freely and informally about the event. The discussion should be

guided and then sentences should be recorded about the event. Publishing of the written account is done with the children so they can be involved. The children then illustrate the story and each child receives a reproduced copy of the story to read independently. The language experience approach integrates speaking, listening, reading and writing into a whole language activity.

Children's Writing

Another important goal of a balanced whole language curriculum is to create a community of children who are writers. Children need to feel security and support from their teachers and peers in the classroom so they know they are free to take risks in writing. To foster this security the teacher needs to let the children select their own writing topics and either continue a topic or start a new topic daily. Teachers need to give ample time for writing each day and incorporate writing into the content areas. In classrooms where writing is taught as a process, quality writing occurs although not all writing may progress through the five stages of the writing process. The stages in the writing process are:

1. Prewriting--the children gather ideas for their topic by brainstorming, listening to literature, sharing events, exploring, visiting, listening to others, using art experiences etc.

2. First draft--the children choose a purpose for their writing which may be to classify, persuade, inform, explain etc., and write their ideas down quickly. They try to focus on the topic, know their audience and incorporate the styles of authors they have heard through reading and listening to literature. The children should try to write in a variety of genres.
3. Revising--the children have a peer or the teacher read their story and comment on areas that need to be reworked (details, clarity, meaning, repetitions etc.). The author makes any changes they wish to make.
4. Editing--the student checks for the correctness of punctuation, capitalization, grammar and spelling with a peer buddy or the teacher.
5. Publishing--the student makes the story into a book with illustrations and shares the published result by reading it from the author's chair, displaying it in the classroom library, tape recording it or reading it to other classes or the principal or on the public address system.

The student writer and the teacher hold group or individual conferences during the writing process to improve writing skills, gain encouragement and improve the quality of their stories. Students in second through sixth grades will usually progress through all stages of the writing process on most pieces of their writing. During the group or individual writing conferences the students reread their stories aloud and

the students and the group discuss problem areas and suggestions are made to the author. The conference participators should be encouraged to make positive comments also and the teacher should record notes about the student or students' progress at the end of the writing conference. Editing can also be accomplished during writing conferences using an editing checklist with each student. (A sample checklist is found in the resource section of the handbook). It is suggested that teachers or peers not mark on a first draft but record comments on post-it papers or on the editing checklist.

When children are writing in the whole language classroom invented spelling should be accepted. Invented spelling is a natural beginning for young writers and invented spelling should be encouraged so that the children can get their thoughts on paper without having reservations about spelling. Conventional spelling can be accomplished during the editing phase of the writing process but conventional spelling does not take priority over meaning in the whole language classroom. Phonics can be taught during mini-lessons and children can be encouraged to use word banks, dictionaries and to ask the teacher as they work toward conventional spelling.

Writing folders can be used in the whole language classroom to store the students' writing samples. Included in these pocket folders which the students can decorate themselves can

be a record of stories written and the dates they were completed, a list of topics for future stories and an editing checklist.

Journal writing is another way to give children an opportunity to write in the whole language classroom in a risk-free atmosphere. The students choose their own topics and ample time is provided for journal writing, usually 15 to 30 minutes. The journals are not graded and students can indicate with a red mark or folded-over page if they wish their journal entry to remain private. Teacher responses in journals are very motivating to the students, however. A spiral notebook of at least 100 pages makes an excellent journal which can be kept by the child. There are different types of journals which the whole language teacher may wish to use:

1. Response journals--the child records a passage from literature and then writes a response to this passage.
2. Research journals--the student writes questions in the journal which are inspired by a thematic unit or content area study then researches to find the answer and records it in the research journal.
3. Science journals--the student records the results of scientific experiments or investigations.
4. Buddy journals--the student writes a response to literature to a buddy and the buddy responds by writing an answer or comments about their response to the book.

A publishing center, either separate or included with

the writing center, is a necessary component of the whole language approach. It is important for children to see some of their writing published so that they have a feeling of ownership. How A Book Is Made by Aliki explains the book publishing process. Parent volunteers are good helpers to involve in the publishing process as they can help students with proofreading, typing, sewing, gluing, lettering and making the covers for their books. (Examples of the publishing process are included in the reference section of the handbook). Not every piece that the children write will be taken as far as the publishing process but editing and publishing of the children's personal writing should be done in consultation with the child if volunteer helpers are used in the publishing process. The children should be involved in all aspects of the writing process.

Modeled Writing

Modeling good writing behavior is very important in the whole language classroom. Modeled writing involves writing in front of the children, either in whole group or small group situations, while talking about the writing processes involved. The teacher needs to explain and model the "what," "why" and "how" of the writing processes as the children watch. This modeled writing may show the students how to indent, how to add details to a paragraph, how to begin a a story, how to use grammar or spelling conventions, how to

use editing marks etc. Modeled writing may occur at the beginning of the children's personal writing time or before journal writing time. The teacher can use excerpts from trade books or use their own personal writing to show how authors use a particular strategy. Teachers may be self conscious about modeling their own writing but it is important for the children to understand that all writers go through the processes of pre-writing, writing, revising and editing before they are satisfied with their work. Writers from other classes in school or local guest authors or illustrators can be invited into the classroom to share their writing styles.

Sharing

A time for sharing the children's work is a necessary component of the whole language program because language is a social process. The children may read a story they have written, read a favorite part of a trade book, give a report, show an art project or give a short skit. Sharing provides a meaningful purpose for producing something that is worthwhile. The presenter receives feedback from their audience during sharing time and the audience learns to listen attentively, give suggestions and ask intelligent questions. At the beginning of the year the whole language teacher will need to model appropriate behavior during sharing time for both the presenter and the audience but can then take a back seat

role when the children are comfortable with the sharing session. Children should sign up for sharing time and the teacher allows time for three or four presenters to share at the end of a language block or other designated time. The teacher will need to check on the preparedness of the presenters and introduce them in turn. When the children are familiar with the procedure they can introduce the presenters and will need very little teacher guidance. Sharing encourages a sense of community among the readers and writers in the classroom. (See book sharing ideas in resource section).

Content Area Reading and Writing

Teaching the content areas in the whole language classroom also involves reading and writing. In the content areas the children will be writing expository text rather than personal narrative and they need time to do research for expository writing. The teacher needs to model how and what to write in each curriculum area. The teacher needs to demonstrate what each type of text is like and how the text is generated. Each form of writing, for example, a newspaper article, has its unique characteristics. The children need to be immersed in many different examples of expository writing so they can become familiar with the different characteristics of each form of writing. In content writing the processes of pre-writing, writing, revising, editing and publishing are also used. During the pre-writing phase the children will determine the audience they are writing to,

brainstorm questions about their topic and research their topic to answer these questions and clarify the vocabulary related to their topic. During the writing phase the children will write in paragraph form with proper main idea sentences, detail sentences and clarity of ideas. During the revising, editing and publishing phases the child will work on grammar conventions, spelling, clarity, illustrations and determine if the writing should be published. Expository writing should also include headings, references, an index, a glossary, a table of contents and a title page if applicable. Whole language teachers integrate the reading-writing processes with science, art, social studies, math and all other curriculum areas by using thematic units throughout the day.

# SECTION III

## Using Thematic Units

A thematic unit is a teaching method used in the whole language classroom. By using thematic units instructional time and materials are planned around a topic which lends itself to the integration of the language arts with the curriculum content areas. There is no separation of language learning. Thematic units allow students to use language naturally and for real purposes to communicate meaning. Unit topics may be based on student interests, special events, seasons, content area units or literature, either a genre or a particular author. Theme topics should be broad in nature and ideally should spiral through the curriculum so that more and more learning is added to each theme as the topics and concepts reappear from grade to grade.

Organizing the whole language classroom around themes has several advantages. Comprehension increases when the areas of the curriculum are connected and taught in a holistic manner. The activities planned in thematic units relate to real life experiences and help set a focus for short range and long range planning. Thematic units are usually four to six weeks in length. Thematic units may be adapted from year to year and themes can be planned and shared with several other teachers.

Literature will be the foundation of any theme so after the theme topic is chosen the teacher should find many lit-

erature selections related to the theme. A to Zoo by Carolyn and John Lima lists books according to themes and can be used as a reference. Next, the whole language teacher will plan the curriculum objectives for the theme which has been selected. (A sample theme outline and theme planning form are found in the reference and resource section of the handbook). The children can help brainstorm ideas for the theme by giving information about what they know or wish to find out about the theme topic. This brainstorming can also be done by the teacher alone or with other teachers. The teacher then organizes these brainstormed ideas into content areas, music, art, physical education, drama, games, cooking, etc., and the language processes of reading, writing, speaking and listening. These categorized ideas are then organized into specific learning activities. Book titles and other information needed for each specific activity are included in the plan. It is wise to keep all thematic unit plans and bibliographies in a folder or binder and store them in a box with the materials which have been gathered together for the theme. These materials may be charts, maps, tapes, games, skill lessons, costumes, poetry etc. needed for each theme. There are many sources of materials which can be used to plan thematic units. These include the students, librarians, computer software, parents, other teachers, field trips and speakers in the community. (I have developed a community resource pamphlet which correlates with the social studies

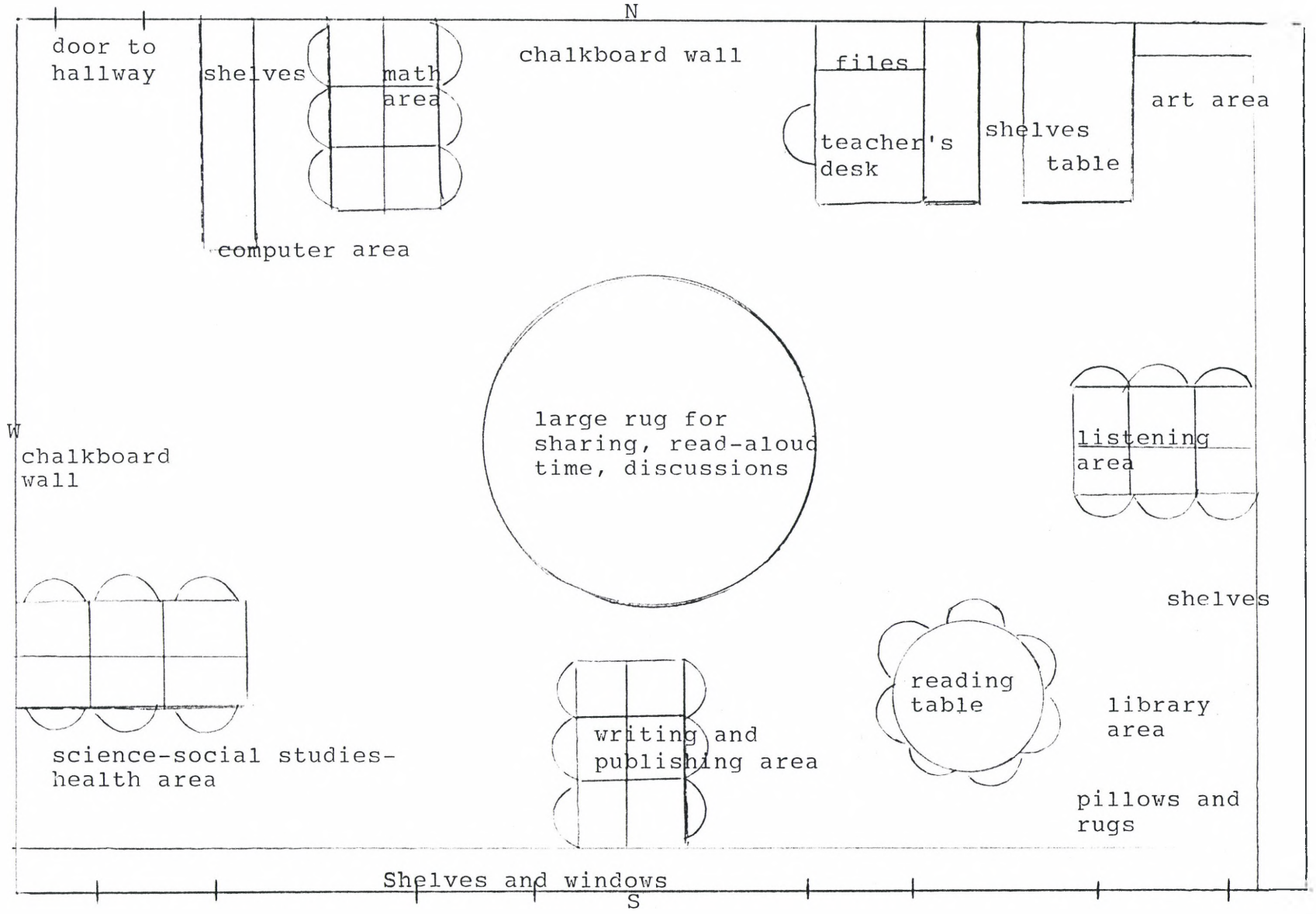
text for grade three and I plan to use this as a guide in planning thematic units for my own classroom). To implement the theme study the teacher plans daily activities which integrate the theme into all the curriculum areas in such a way that the objectives of the theme study are met, evaluated and learning is shared. Using thematic units is the highest level of teacher development and proficiency and it may take the teacher several years to completely integrate the curriculum by using thematic units. An integrated curriculum planned on a broad thematic base, however, allows students to learn naturally and make connections in order to understand their learning environment.

# SECTION IV

## The Classroom Environment, Scheduling, and Materials

### Classroom Environment

The physical arrangement of the whole language classroom is important in creating a learning environment. Well defined areas for group learning and individual learning should be arranged. There should be plenty of space for display of the children's work and their projects. There should be ample storage space for the many materials needed in the whole language classroom. The physical layout of the whole language classroom reflects the teaching philosophy and provides for the requirements that arise from numerous hands-on activities going on by individuals and groups. The furniture, space and materials should be arranged in a functional, friendly and comfortable manner. Several shelves and tables are needed in the whole language classroom. Tables are more flexible and sensible than desks because they can be moved as one unit and make better discussion areas but if desks are used they can be grouped in clusters of four to six to create areas for group work. It may take time for both the children and the teacher to change from using student desks to using tables only. Provision needs to be made for the storage of student belongings if student desks are not used. A drawing of an example of classroom space and furniture arrangement is shown here:


N
door to hallway
shelves
math area
chalkboard wall
files
teacher's desk
shelves
table
art area
computer area
large rug for sharing, read-aloud time, discussions
W
chalkboard wall
E
listening area
shelves
science-social studies-health area
writing and publishing area
reading table
library area
pillows and rugs
Shelves and windows
S

Scheluling

It is possible to schedule the day in the whole language classroom so that the day runs smoothly and effectively and all plans are accomplished. The whole language teacher needs to think holistically. The teacher needs to first fill in activities on the classroom schedule which are part of the school's master schedule such as physical education, art and music times, student pull-out times and opening activities and dismissal times. The teacher should combine activities as much as possible and plan the day as a whole rather than in segments. Center times or small group activities can be planned during conference periods or teacher-directed group times. Considerable time is saved in instruction time when the day is planned around themes and literature is used to incorporate content area learning. Large blocks of time should be planned for reading and writing during which time the content areas of the curriculum are integrated. It is very helpful to have student or parent volunteers in the classroom during these large blocks of time so that the teacher can concentrate on individual or group reading or writing conferences or other activities. In the whole language classroom student groups should be flexible and heterogeneously organized so that labelling does not occur and the children have opportunities to cooperate and socialize with their peers in their classroom activities. Some groups will have a leader appointed by the teacher on a daily or weekly basis. A sample daily schedule for a lower elementary

whole language classroom could be as follows:

8:20 Opening--read-aloud time, journal work, library time, center time, morning routines such as attendance, pledge, calendar, weather, etc.

9:00 Math--manipulatives work, mini-lessons, cooperative learning groups, math assignment work

10:00 to 12:00 Language arts block--poems, songs, chants, shared reading, author's chair, language centers (teacher-directed groups, peer reading groups, vocabulary center, content centers, art center or listening center)

12:00 to 1:00 Lunch, recess

1:00 to 2:00 Thematic unit study--integrating reading and writing with content area learning

2:00 to 2:30 Sustained silent reading

2:30 to 3:10 Special classes

3:10 to 3:30 Homework explanation, games, brain teasers, read aloud, sharing time

Making smooth transitions from activity to activity is always a problem in any classroom. The teacher could begin the day with independent activities while necessary paper work is done and follow that with the whole group activities of planning for the day, pledge, read-aloud time etc. Large blocks of learning such as language arts block could be started with warm-up activities such as exercises or songs or poems to stimulate interest. Non-verbal signals such as a bell, a sign or the lights can be used to make the transi-

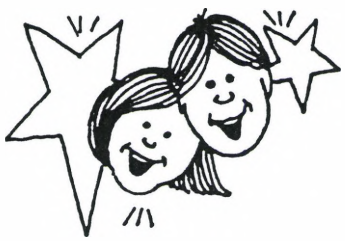
tion to a different activity. Timers can be used to keep groups on schedule and lists of free time activities will help those who finish tasks early. The transition activities should be practiced and modeled for several weeks at the beginning of the school year until the children are familiar with these procedures.

Organizing Materials

There will be many, many materials in use at all times in the whole language classroom but materials need to be organized so that the teacher and the students can find them quickly and easily. If possible, books should be arranged with the covers showing. They can be arranged in neat boxes or plastic baskets by authors, theme or subject. A bookshelf near the teacher's desk can hold books needed for special lessons or read-aloud time. Reference materials such as dictionaries, thesauruses and nonfiction books should be grouped together and labelled. A variety of genres should be available to the children. A suggestion is 500 books for a classroom of 30 children. Colored dots on books may be used to indicate genres. Multiple copies of books should also be available and stored together for small group or whole group instruction or listening center activities. Big books, magazines, and newspapers can be stored on small ladders, on drying racks, on hangers or in plastic baskets. Writing folders can hold the children's writing that is in progress and folders with brads can hold the children's

reading records. Both reading and writing folders can be stored in plastic baskets or in the children's storage bins. Learning centers should be set up simply using commercial and teacher-made materials arranged attractively. The children should be responsible for clean up and restocking the learning center areas. The materials for the writing center and publishing center should include all kinds of writing paper, hole punch, pencils, markers, clipboards, slates, glue, scissors, pencil sharpeners etc.

The materials the teacher uses frequently should be stored for quick and easy access. Frequently used charts should be laminated and hung on a clothesline with clothes pins. All materials that are used with a specific book can be stored in a folder and labelled "Literature Lesson" for that book and placed in a file cabinet in alphabetical order. Detailed lesson plans and activities for thematic units can be stored in a binder and kept next to the lesson plan book which usually does not have enough writing space for writing detailed plans. It is also a good idea for the whole language teacher to keep a substitute teacher folder on her desk at all times with details about the class schedule and organization included.



# SECTION V

## Evaluation, Assessment and Communication with Parents in the Whole Language Classroom

### Evaluation and Assessment

The purpose of evaluation in the whole language classroom should be to record the growth of literacy in individual students over the course of the school year. This evaluation occurs by constantly observing and charting the growth of the students in literacy learning. The tools and methods needed for assessment in the whole language classroom need to be useful and easily accessible. The data they provide must be understandable to the teacher and the parents of the students. The assessment of the students is the teachers's responsibility and should be done on a daily basis. A good method is to keep a folder for each child. In this folder the teacher can store samples of the children's writing, a list of books read, reports, posters etc. A variety of samples from all curriculum areas should be kept. Writing anecdotal notes on post-it pads during personal writing time with the student's name and date on them can be stuck to individual folders at the end of the day. The records should note what the children can do and should not concentrate on their weaknesses. The teacher should write anecdotal records on each child at least once a week or more often if possible. A small spiral notebook can be used in-

stead of the post-it notes and at the end of the week the teacher can highlight the useful notes and transfer these records into the individual student folders. The writing files and reading record files for each student can also be used for evaluation purposes.

Some teachers keep scrapbooks of the students' work and use them for evaluation and send them home at the end of the year. Another useful assessment tool is the audio or video cassette recorder. The teacher can tape the student reading aloud or reporting to the class. An interest survey can provide important information to the teacher about the children's attitudes toward reading and learning. (A sample interest inventory is included in the reference and resource section of the handbook).

If standardized testing has to be done in the whole language classroom the children should be given the opportunity to become familiar with the format and language of the test. New tests need to be developed which more closely reflect the philosophy of whole language learning.

The Reading Miscue Inventory as developed by Yetta Goodman and Carolyn Burke and Dorothy Watson can be used to analyze how well the children are using graphophonetic, sematic and syntactic cues in their reading and individual strategy lessons can be developed on the basis of this information. Basic sight word tests, literacy skills checklists and self-concept profiles are also useful tools to assess learning in

the whole language classroom. (Samples of checklists are included in the reference and resource section of the handbook).

Communicating With Parents

Parental involvement is very important and necessary in the whole language classroom. The more contact whole language teachers have with the parents of their students the more support and understanding there will be on the part of the parents. Whole language programs may seem strange to parents who are not familiar with this concept. At the beginning of the year it is important to hold meetings with the parents as a group to describe activities in which the children will be involved, answer questions and let the parents voice concerns that they might have. At this meeting the teacher should explain goals for the year, the curriculum that is required for the grade level and daily routines and procedures. The teacher should emphasize the whole language goal of producing children who love to read and who are constantly searching for meaning in their language learning. Parents need to be assured that the whole language approach is not an experiment or a new fad and that the approach is grounded in theory and research. Reprints of articles on whole language can be passed out to parents. These parent meetings could be scheduled throughout the year. A weekly newsletter is also a good way to keep parents informed about big events, theme studies and help or supplies

that are needed.

At parent conference time the whole language teacher should have the student's folder with examples of the child's work and the anecdotal records available for discussion. The teacher could also play or show the audio or video tapes that they have used for assessment.

It is important to use the parents' expertise in the whole language classroom. They have talents that can relate to thematic units, they can volunteer to help in the classroom, or they can help children with the publishing process in the writing center. They can help with cooking projects, listen to children read and be valuable assets in the whole language classroom.

# SECTION VI

## References and Resources

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Resources

A. Guidelines for Asking Discussion Questions

1. Try to ask questions about what is going to be read. This encourages higher level thinking.
2. Ask important questions.
3. Ask questions that follow naturally from an initial question.
4. Avoid diversionary questions.
5. Ask predictive questions that explore more than one possibility.
6. Remember, just because a question begins with the word "why" does not necessarily make it a thought question.
7. Save some of the thought provoking questions until after the reading is completed.
8. Ask questions that access prior knowledge and encourage students to use what they've already read.
9. Ask questions that center around story problems.
10. Ask metacognitive questions before, during and after the reading.

B. Sample Questions

to Promote Discussion and Comprehension

1. What happened in the story?
2. What might have happened if a certain event had not taken place?
3. Which part or chapter was the most important to the story?
4. Where did the story take place?

5. How did the writer create the atmosphere for the setting?

6. Which character did you like best and why?

7. Read a passage that tells you about a story character's personality.

8. What special words did the author use to help you create images in your mind?

9. How does the author let you know where and when the story takes place?

10. How did you feel while reading this book?

11. Does the mood of the story change and why?

12. Why did you choose this book to read?

C. Sample Reading Record

Name_____

| Title | Author | Date |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

(Continue in this manner on 8 1/2 by 11 paper and copy on both sides. The children will fasten these in their reading folders which have brads).

D. Sample Student Editing Checklist

Story title_____

Name_____Date_____

1. Each sentence begins with a capital letter._____
2. Names of people and places are capitalized._____
3. My story title and book titles are capitalized._____
4. My sentences end with a period, question mark or exclamation mark._____
5. I have corrected all misspelled words to the best of my ability._____
6. I have indented each new paragraph._____
7. I have used quotation marks to show where conversation begins and ends._____
8. My writing used descriptive words._____
9. I have used my best handwriting._____
10. I have reread my piece and have checked it for mistakes before handing it in._____

## E. Instructions for Making Books

Materials needed:

| | |
|---|---|
| cardboard | contact paper |
| typing paper | heavy duty tagboard |
| rubber cement | glue |
| binding tape | vinyl letters |
| waxed dental floss | scissors |
| needles | folders for student's stories |
| construction paper | cloth |
| wallpaper | wrapping paper |

Putting the book together:

The pages in the book may include front cover, title page, dedication page, story, author biography and back cover. The pages may simply be stapled together before being put into a cover. The pages may be glued to a backing of construction paper, then stapled together and covered. The pages may be folded in half, then glued back to back. The pages may be folded and then stitched down the center by hand or on the sewing machine. If a class book is created, select one student to illustrate the cover before attaching it to the book. The cover pieces should always be about 1/2 inch larger than the writing paper.

Quick and easy cover:

Staple cover to stories. Cover the staples with a strip of tape. Punch holes through the cover and stories. Put

together with metal rings, shoe laces, yarn or string.

Hinged covers:

Cut two pieces of tag or cardboard a little larger than the story pages. Cut 1/2 inch strip from the left hand side of the front cover. Tape the strips together on the inside. Leave 1/8 inch space open between the two strips. Staple the cover and story pages together. Cover the front hinge and staples and the back staples with a 1 1/2 inch piece of tape.

Folded tag cover:

Cut colored tag slightly larger than the story pages. Score the center and fold and rub firmly. Paste the story pages back to back. Add an empty page to the front and back of the story for end pages. Paste the end pages to the cover. This cover can only be used for books having no more than six to ten pages.

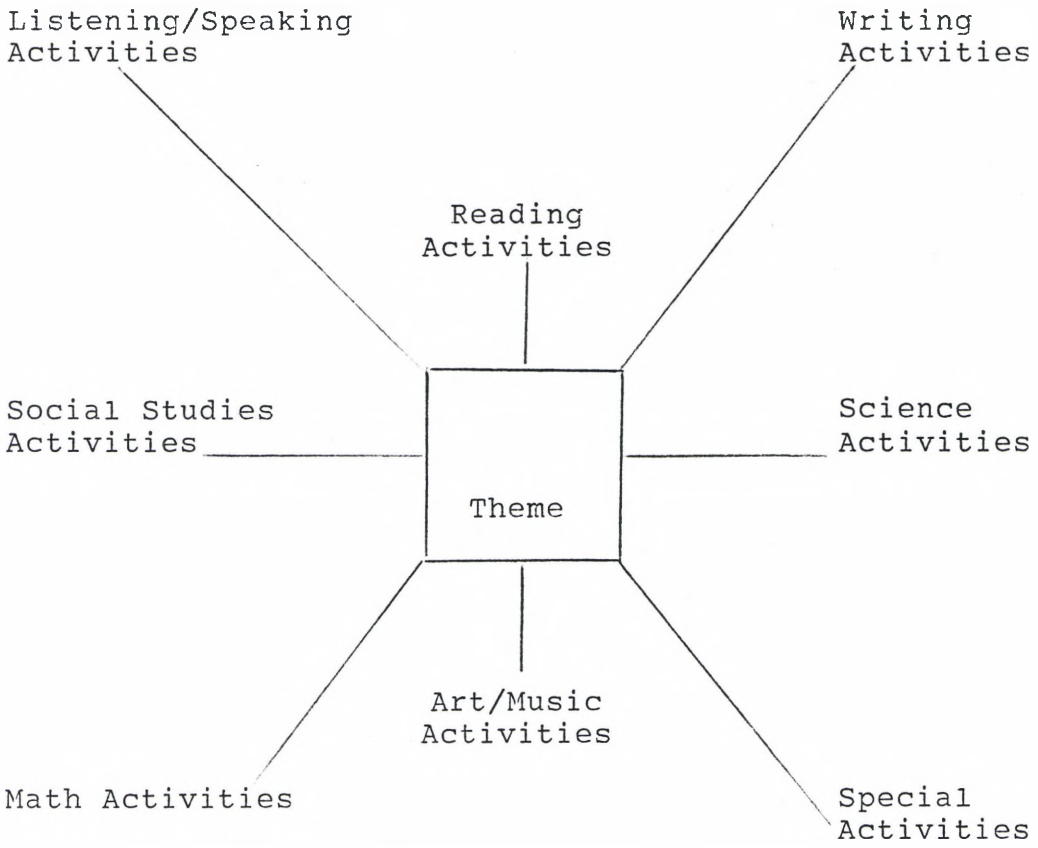
Cloth cover:

Cut two pieces of cardboard slightly larger than the story pages. Place the cardboard on a piece of cloth about 1 to 1 1/2 inches larger than the cover. Leave a small space in between the cover pieces. Miter the corners and center the cardboard pieces on the fabric. Place diluted white flue on the cloth and fold over the cover. The story pages should be cut almost the length of the cover. Stitch four to six pages together down the center with a darning needle and thread or on the sewing machine. Leave the first and last pages empty

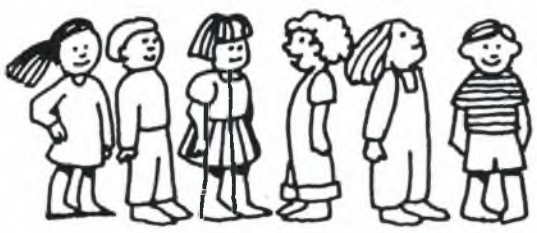
to serve as end papers. Write and illustrate the story. Paste the end papers to the cover to complete the book.

Source: How to Make Books with Children by J. Evans and J. Moore, 1985.

F. Theme Outline




Source: A Whole Language Approach to Reading by Gordon S. Anderson, 1984.



G. Theme Planning Form

Theme_____Time Frame_____

Objectives_____

Poems/Songs/Chart Stories:

Center Activities:

Books:

Language Arts Activities:

Social Studies/Science/Health

Math:

Textbook Selections:

Special Events:

Art Activities:

Source: A Whole Language Approach to Reading by Gordon S. Anderson, 1984.

## H. Sample Interest Survey

Name_____Date_____Grade_____

1. Do you like to read? Yes No
2. What kind of stories do you like best?
3. What is the name of your favorite book?
4. Name any book you have read more than once. Write how many times you have read it._____
5. Write the name of any book you didn't like and tell why.

6. Do you ever read a book instead of watching television? Yes No
7. Have you ever read a book because one of your friends said it was good? Yes No
8. Give the names of some books you have at home.

9. What are your hobbies and collections?

10. Do you read a book if you have seen the movie or TV program based on it? Yes No
11. Name some of the last movies you saw.

12. What do you want to be?

Source: A Reading and Writing Evaluation Resourcebook by Gordon S. Anderson, 1989

## I. Sample Self Concept Profile

All About Me:

1. My full name is_____Grade_____

2. I am_____years old. 3. My birthday is_____

4. I live at this address:

All About My Family:

1. My father's name is_____

2. My mother's name is_____

3. I have_____sisters. Their names are:_____

4. I have_____brothers. Their names are:_____

What I Would Like to Do:

1. I would like to take a trip to_____

2. I would like to make_____

3. I would like to read about_____

Things I Think About:

1. I wish I were_____

2. I wish I could_____

3. I wish I had_____

4. Sometimes I worry about or I am the most afraid about___

_____

5. I wish my teacher would_____

What I Like:

1. I like to collect_____

2. I like to read about_____

3. My favorite television programs are_____

4. My favorite games are_____

5. My favorite person is_____

6. What I like to do with this person is to_____

7. At home I like to: play with friends____play games_____ watch TV_____help in the house_____ have someone read to me_____ What else do you like to do?_____

How I Feel:

1. I feel good when I_____
2. I really feel bad when I_____
3. When I am mad, I_____
4. I remember my dreams about_____
5. The worst thing that ever happened to me_____
6. The best thing that ever happened to me_____
7. The thing I do best is_____
8. The thing I do worst is_____
9. Some things I like about myself are_____
10. Some things I do not like about myself are_____
11. Some things I like about my family are_____
12. Some things I do not like about my family are_____
13. When I grow up I want to be_____
14. I like to learn by_____
15. I like to work by myself_____with one person_____ with several friends_____
16. I like people when they_____
17. I don't like people when they_____
18. Here is a picture of me.

From A Reading and Writing Evaluation Resourcebook by Gordon S. Anderson, 1989.

J. Sample Literacy Skills Checklist

Attitudes:

views self as a reader/writer

enjoys reading/writing

reads/writes on own time

shares reading/writing with others

borrows books freely

reads/writes silently for sustained periods of time

enjoys read-aloud time

selects a variety of books (fiction and nonfiction)

seeks advice when necessary

selects book appropriate to purpose, interest and difficulty

uses library effectively (card catalogue, resource material)

takes risks

enjoys talking to share information or tell a story

Concepts of Print:

understands that print conveys meaning (reading and writing)

understands directional conventions: front to back, top to bottom, lift to right, page turning

understands concepts of letter, word, line sentence, paragraph, page, book

demonstrates knowledge of punctuation when reading/writing

Oral Language:

expresses a complete thought

tells a story

shares information

volunteers for discussion

Comprehending Strategies (Process of Reading):

reads for meaning

processes chunks of language (does not read word for word)

uses a variety of strategies:

-makes predictions and self-corrects when predictions are unsatisfactory

-notices miscues if they interfere with meaning

-reads on to end of sentence

-rereads sentence

-uses pictures as cue, then predicts

-uses initial letter or letters as cue and predicts

-uses syntactic cues (substitutes word that grammatically fits in the sentence)

-uses semantic cues (substitutes word that fits meaning in the sentence)

Comprehension:

reconstructs story

constructs meaning from the written information

relates new information to prior experiences

discusses parts of a story: character, plot, setting, theme, writing style

recalls main ideas and details

recognizes or infers: sequence, cause and effect, similarities or differences to materials previously read

distinguishes: reality, fantasy, fact, opinion, significant information, insignificant information, quality of information

Responding to Reading:

prepares for an oral rendition of a selection

reads a prepared piece with expression

differentiates between good and poor literature

can support likes and dislikes of stories read

responds to material read in a variety of ways: art work, oral sharing, writing extensions, writing logs or critiques

locates specific parts of text

Writing:

writes to communicate ideas rather than accuracy of mechanics in first draft

edits material for standard spelling and mechanics

uses a variety of strategies while writing:

-prewrites for purpose and development of own style

-rereads

-shares with others for clarity of meaning and purpose

-confers with peers or teacher to develop ideas

-uses invented spellings when needed

-uses reference materials when appropriate

uses a variety of strategies while revising:

-volunteers to share writing in the author's chair

-takes suggestions appropriately

-attends a peer or teacher writing conference

-adds or deletes words or ideas when appropriate

uses a variety of strategies while editing:

-uses dictionary to find conventional spellings

-rereads for punctuation

-rereads for grammar

-requests peer or teacher conference for final editing

critically evaluates own writing:

-selects quality pieces to bring to published form

-knows when to put piece aside

-knows when more information is needed

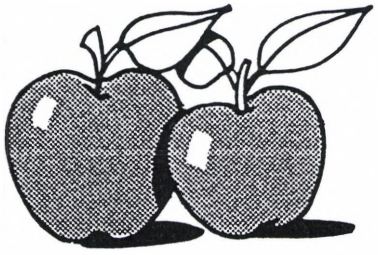
writes for a variety of audiences and purposes: self, friend, teacher, classmates

Listening:

listens attentively to: stories read by teacher or peers, information shared by teacher or peers

listens attentively so that an appropriate response may be made in class discussion or small group discussion

Source: Language Arts Course of Study, Lou Ann Harrold, Coordinator, Hardin County, Kenton, Ohio, 1990.



## K. Sources for Teaching Guides for Specific Titles of Children's Literature

Dell Publishing Co. 245 East 47 St., New York, New York, 10017.

Green, Phyllis and Troy, Anne. Fly High With Novel Units. Novel Units, P. O. Box 1461, Palatine, Illinois 60078.

Moss, Joy. Focus Units in Literature. National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Illinois 61801.

Perfection Form Company, 1000 North Second Avenue, Logan, Iowa 51546.

Perma-Bound Books, A Division of Hertzberg-New Method, Inc., Vandalia Rd., Jacksonville, Illinois, 62650

Scholastic, Inc., P. O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102

Sommers, Albert B. Response Guides for Children's Books. National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Illinois 60810

## L. Examples of Book Sharing Ideas

Write a summary of the story.

Write about the character you liked or disliked most.

Read an exciting part aloud.

Make a map showing where the story took place.

Make a list of new, unusual and interesting words from the book and tell what they mean.

Explain and perform an experiment from a science book.

Make a family tree for a biography book.

Make a timeline for a book.

Compare a character in the book with yourself or with someone you know.

Pantomime in front of the class a scene from the book.

Write one or two good riddles about your book.

Write a poem about the book, a character or the scenery.

Tell why you would like or dislike to live next door to the main character in the story.

Tell why this book should be in every library.

How would you have acted differently from the main character in the story?

M. Sources of Booklists of Children's Literature

Journals which can be found at the library:

The Horn Book, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal and Booklist

T. N. T. Tips and Titles of Books for Grades K-6, Jan Lieberman, University of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA 95053

Children's Books 199-, Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office Washington, D. C. 20402

American Library Association, 50 Huron St., Chicago, Ill. 60611

Source: The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease, 1985.

## N. Children's Books

Examples of Predictable Books

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears/Verna Aardema

The Very Busy Spider/Eric Carle

Fortunately/Remy Charlip

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See:/Bill Martin, Jr.

Examples of Pictures Books for Beginning Fluent Readers

Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain/Verna Aardema

How a Book is Made/ Aliki

Miss Nelson Is Missing/Harry Allard

Miss Rumphius/Barbara Cooney

Examples of Chapter Books for Fluent Readers

Freckle Juice/Judy Blume

The Mouse and the Motorcycle/Beverly Clearly

Chocolate Fever/Robert Kimmel Smith

My Father's Dragon/Ruth Stiles Gannett

Examples of Read-Aloud Books for Third Graders

The Indian in the Cupboard/Lynne Reid Banks

Queenie Peavy/Robert Burch

A Wrinkle in Time/Madeleine L'Engle

The Trumpet of the Swans/E. B. White

Examples of Poetry Books for Children

Dogs and Dragons, Trees and Dreams/Karla Kuskin

Piping Down the Valleys Wild/Nancy Larrick

Spin a Soft Black Song/Nikki Giovanni

Random House Book of Poetry for Children/Jack Prelutsky

# CHAPTER IV

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whole Language is a difficult concept to define. This was the writer's problem when considering this Project. The writer was not totally familiar with the philosophy or all the teaching methods used in the whole language approach even though this concept has been used in classrooms all over the world for well over ten years. The writer found through reading various journals and books, attending workshops, and taking graduate-level reading courses that the whole language approach to classroom teaching is exciting and interesting.

Language learning and content area learning are integrated as much as possible in the whole language classroom. The teacher is the most important variable in making the whole language classroom a reality. Whole language learning is promoted in the classroom when the processes of language--listening, speaking, reading and writing--are integrated. Whole language is promoted when children are engaged in hands-on learning experiences in the content areas they are learning. Whole language is promoted when children are taught to relate what they are learning to their own lives--their real worlds. Whole language is promoted when children are given opportunities for finding and expressing meaning in whatever they do.

It is recommended that the writer continue her reading and study on the whole language philosophy and components of the whole language approach as set forth in the handbook.

The writer is currently in a transitional stage in the whole language approach and plans to try to use thematic units to integrate the curriculum areas of math, science, social studies, and health into the language arts areas of the curriculum as the next step in her goal of having an ideal whole language classroom.

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